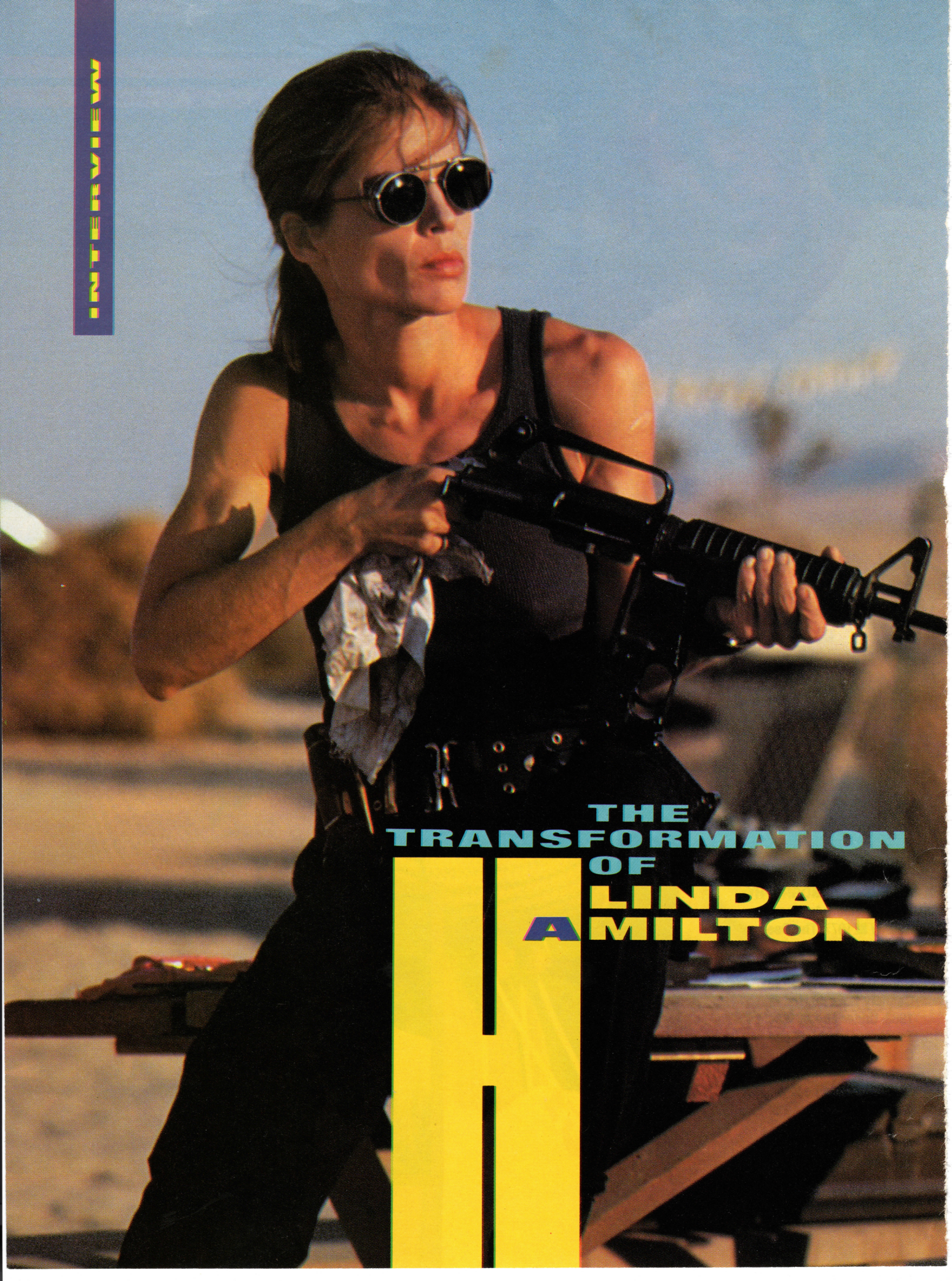
INTERVIEW



THE TRANSFORMATION OF LINDA HAMILTON

If I hadn't trained so hard, I would not have survived this picture! For months before and during the shoot, I worked like a dog to reshape my body, and acquire strength and stamina. Now it's become a way of life. I don't think I'll ever be able to let go. I'm an addict!"

Linda Hamilton may be an addict, but her habit requires no cure. ***Terminator 2: Judgement Day*** *has transformed the 34-year-old performer from a soft-shaped sweetheart to an iron-willed hardbody—on screen and off. The metamorphosis could not be more perfectly timed: the current crop of female firepower (****Thelma & Louise****,* ***V.I. Warshawski****,* ***Alien 3****) suggests that '90s Hollywood may be swapping cuddlesome helpmates for cunning heroines.*

Reared in Salisbury, Maryland, with an identical twin sister and a younger brother, Hamilton discovered acting through hometown stage groups and eventually attended Lee Strasberg's Theatre Institute, after a two-year stint at Washington College. Finding her paycheck debut with a nine-line bit on the soap ***Search for Tomorrow****, she followed with the short-lived cathode series* ***Secrets of Midland Heights*** *and* ***King's Crossing****, which led to small-screen flicks, then* ***The Terminator****.*

PREVUE *hunted down the 5'5", 112-pound warrior following one of her all-morning workouts. A resident of Santa Monica, she lives with Dalton, her two-year-old son by ex-husband Bruce (****Re-Animator****) Abbott. "My child has a part in* ***T2****, the playground scene, which required him to explode. Of course, it was only a dummy, but the shot was still very upsetting—more for me than him," she jokes.*

As the conversation begins, she takes a long drag from the first of many Camels. Without makeup, and dressed entirely in black—a sleek jacket, semi-revealing blouse, stretch pants, and mid-calf lace boots—Hamilton frequently tosses her shoulder-length blonde tresses off her face. Her soft, almost sad, aqua eyes contrast sharply with her tense, toned, ***T2*** *physique.*

Seven years separate the original and the sequel. What's changed?

Lots. When we started the sequel, I deliberately did *not* watch **The Terminator** because I wanted to give Sarah a new history and memory. But toward the shoot's end, I did see the original, and, for the first time, I didn't like my work or the picture. I kept thinking, "Look at her. She's weak, and her voice squeals. She's mincemeat!" It wasn't interesting because now I'm playing a deeper, more powerful and troubled character.

Certainly more muscular. How did you make the physical transformation from timid victim to militant victor?

For almost a year, I ran, lifted weights, trampolined, aerobicized, and bicycled—three hours a day, six days a week. In the past I'd spent months at health clubs, but the training was never this focused. Now I'm stronger, I survive on four hours of sleep a night, and I'm much more confident.

Still, there were drawbacks. I got bigger than I wanted, a bit unfeminine. My legs got so muscular I couldn't wear my old pants. Lately, my workouts have become more moderate; I think of them as a kind of meditation.

If that's the case, then why have you been smoking for the last five minutes?

Early in preproduction, I considered quitting, but I soon noticed that I was doing six-mile runs without getting winded. So I said, "Gee, I guess I don't have to stop." But yeah, I should.

Despite the cigarettes, you also survived military training under Israeli ex-commando Uzi Gal. Focusing on automatic weapons and judo, those sessions combined with the fitness work totaled about six hours a day.

Because I don't believe in guns or killing, the commando work was unnerving at first. I had to try very hard to strip away the emotional stuff and adopt a military mindset. There's something to be said for addressing that place within you. After all, if you get mad at your gun when it jams in combat, you'll die; you've got to clear the weapon and keep looking for your target.

I admit that **T2** walks a fine line between glamorizing and condemning killing, and that most people will see the film because of the violence. Hopefully, they'll also come away with a bit of the film's *antiwar* message: **T2** is basically a violent film about peace.

It's also very timely, a reflection of our world. The Gulf War was happening while I was training, wearing a SWAT uniform, and shooting guns on a range. Women are certainly not the equals of men in strength, but pound for pound, inch for inch, we can be just as effective fighters. Women should be allowed to do what they want, and if that means going to battle, then fine. Personally, I don't believe in war.

For a peacenik, you put up a helluva fight, performing many of your own stunts.

I had no choice! I've had a great stunt double for years, but with my shoulders and arms so much leaner and stronger now, I was reluctant to give up screen time. I was like, "No, thank you. I'll do it *myself*." Lucikly, director Jim Cameron didn't argue; he lets everybody live as dangerously as they want.

How dangerous did it get for you?

Getting shot at. Squibs [fx devices to simulate bullet hits] take two hours to set up, and I just couldn't keep track of what was actually supposed to be happening. I got so glassy-eyed and confused that I couldn't do two things in a row by the end of the day. I wound up bobbing like a chicken, just losing it completely. Now I know what it's like to be shell-shocked in a war.

The scene where I hunt down Dyson, the inventor of the Skynet computers, was rough emotionally because it was poorly designed from the acting standpoint. We filmed it over five days, and by the end, my performance was not very fresh.

Do you ever ad-lib lines to keep your performance fresh?

Once during shooting, I asked Jim for a small line change, and he just froze. "What the fuck are you talking about?" he said. "Don't mess with my words!" I remember thinking, "He's going off!" Turns out he was just teasing me, but I didn't realize it at the time.

Cameron is not an easygoing director. His demands are legendary, and his motto "That's perfect; do it again!" is an industry classic.

He's not very popular with some people, but there's a lot of talent behind his toughness. On the first film, I didn't trust him. But when I saw the picture, I realized he was a visionary. This time, I

TOUGH TALK FROM TERMINATOR 2's TENACIOUS TIGER!

worked with him a lot before filming began; that way, I didn't have to compete for his attention along with 190 other people. Because I gave him what he wanted, we had relatively few problems.

I also appreciate Jim because his films use strong women characters—there are definitely not enough of them on screen. In the original, I'm on the verge of being a legend; here, I *am* the legend—a crazy warrior woman with little sanity and less hope. It was a scary challenge to pull Sarah off right.

With *T2*'s cost reported at 100 times your $1-mil salary, the challenge to make the film a boxoffice blockbuster must have also been formidable.

Actually, the shoot seemed *more* relaxed than the original, which had a small budget, about $6 million. Back then, the execs would come on set and say, "If you shoot one more scene in the future, we'll wrap you right now!" It was horrible! On **T2**, there must have been some seriously worried people, but I never felt their impact.

Neither did Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was much more relaxed on set than Cameron.

I didn't work with Arnold much on the first film—he was usually on one unit while I'd be on another—but on both projects he was always pleasant and professional. I like lean, angular looks, not pumped up muscles. So this time he was also *physically* appealing: smaller, but still larger than life.

You also felt an offscreen bond with Eddie Furlong, who plays Sarah's son John.

I'm very maternal. Since he's only 13, there were times when I just went, "Focus, Eddie! Focus!" I was in his face just as Sarah would be, and I don't think he knew what to make of me. I was hard on him, but he was a true, little champ.

Not all your good work made it into the release print, though.

Right. There was one scene when Sarah, who originally wants to kill Schwarzenegger's Terminator, allows John to stay with him while she goes to execute Dyson. But the film was too long, so they cut the scene. Still, it had some great cinematography, and it featured my real-life identical twin sister, Leslie Gearren, who's a nurse in New Jersey. She played my mirror reflection, and we imitated each other's moves. It was wild, and no one would have known how it was done.

Now that the *Terminator* saga is apparently over—on set, you popularized the slogan "*T3* without me," with which Cameron agrees, even though Schwarzenegger warns, "Never say never"—what's next? Perhaps a brief return to the stage, where you were trained.

Because I've done so little theatre in recent years, I've gotten scared of it. It makes my heart pound. So I guess I'll *have* to do it, maybe Shakespeare, a musical, or something zany.

Despite *Beauty and the Beast*'s continued popularity, you've made it clear you'll never return to it.

It's disturbing that people can't let things go, but enough is enough. I *died* doing that show—48 mini-movies exactly the same. I wanted the characters to evolve, but the network always stuck with the formula. Besides, I had a baby and wanted to be a good mother, which I couldn't do working 16 hours a day. So, as valuable as the experience was, I needed to move on. Repetition is really something in which I have no interest.

The same is true in film. Most of my pictures have been action-adventures—not many of them have been good. So I'm looking for a new direction, even though I love the gut instinct and on-your-feet thinking required for action movies. I'd love to make a female western, but I also like comedy. I'm going to get a lot of offers for **Terminator** imitations, but I'd rather prove what else I can do.

Could *T2* typecast you forever?

Maybe, but I'm happy with where I am. Whatever happens, I'm sure I'll be happier as time progresses. I've never had any difficulty being a woman in the business, and I've never been approached on the casting-couch level. Like everybody else, I get caught up in the craziness of the business. Then I spend two minutes sitting on the floor playing with the baby, and I'm right back where I need to be.

These last few years have been hard—I've been very, very alone. But the role of Sarah has really helped me economize emotionally and keep my eyes on target, no matter how difficult the task. It's a real awakening to realize that life is about hard work, so you'd better enjoy it.

I know it's a foolish thing to say, but after **T2**, I don't think *anything* can hurt me.

★ *Joe Gillis*

LINDA HAMILTON SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

■ 1980: **Rape and Marriage: The Rideout Case** (TV) ■ 1982: **TAG: The Assassination Game**; **Country Gold** (TV) ■ 1984: **The Terminator**; **Children of the Corn**; **The Stone Boy** ■ 1985: **Secret Weapons** (TV) ■ 1986: **Black Moon Rising**; **Club Med** (TV); **King Kong Lives** ■ 1988: **Go Toward the Light** (TV) ■ 1990: **Mr. Destiny** ■ 1991: **Terminator 2: Judgement Day**.



RIGHT: Hamilton huddles with director Jim Cameron, Joe Morton (Miles Dyson), and Schwarzenegger. LEFT: Sarah shoots down her old image.



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